

UNFINISHED REVOLUTION



NOT SO SILENT: A NEW CONSERVATIONISM IN MID-CENTURY MONTGOMERY COUNTY

By Rebecca Henson



MONTGOMERY
HISTORY



Montgomery County, Maryland marks its 250th anniversary on September 6, 2026. To commemorate the occasion, Montgomery History presents *Unfinished Revolution*, a project to share important stories from our past that combine to tell a more complete and inclusive history of this county. The numerous authors commissioned for this project explore topics related to the history of Montgomery County that either address events that took place from the 1960s forward or fill in gaps by addressing subjects that have been underrepresented or left out of the existing published historical narrative. In embracing the theme of an “Unfinished Revolution,” we bring focus to the still-unmet promise of 1776 while rotating its vision to align with our shared journey toward the future.

Montgomery History—the county’s historical society—has been serving residents and the region through its research library, adult programs, educational activities, publications, exhibits, and conferences since the organization was founded in 1944. Its mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and share the histories of all county residents and communities.

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Cover image: Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, photograph by Shirley Briggs, c. 1953. Iowa Women’s Archive, University of Iowa.

NOT SO SILENT: A NEW CONSERVATIONISM IN MID-CENTURY MONTGOMERY COUNTY

By Rebecca Henson

Introduction

*“Listen!” Rachel Carson instructed two dear friends as she pulled her phone receiver outside her window into the evening air of her Silver Spring yard. From Massachusetts, Dorothy and Stan Freeman could hear the piercing pulse of woods and vernal pools along the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River. Carson continued to beam the frog song over the phone line with a sense of renewal and relief, “My first Spring peepers!”*¹

While undoubtedly influenced by myriad individuals, events, and movements from the late 19th century and early 20th century, the modern environmental movement as we recognize it today took shape in the middle of the 20th century, chiefly formed by a community of local nature-loving civil servants skilled in science, communication, and the arts and through key events taking place in Montgomery County, Maryland. The activities of the independent Audubon Society of the District of Columbia—the organization that brought many of these individuals together and would eventually find its permanent home in the county—both reflected and furthered the conservation values and ambitions of many of its leading members, including Rachel Carson, Roger Tory Peterson, and Shirley Briggs. Major flash points in the burgeoning environmental movement—including the highly-publicized hike to preserve the C&O Canal and its towpath and Carson’s penning of the groundbreaking and perspective-widening *Silent Spring*—were intrinsically connected to the natural areas where they took place, from the county’s western edge along the Potomac River to the verdant woods and vibrant creeks of Silver Spring.

D.C. Audubon Society: Laying the Groundwork

When the local Audubon Society was founded in 1897, the conservation organization placed significant focus on songbird protection amid mass capture and killing for the popular millenary fashion of the period. The means of ending the destructive practices that were leading to declining populations of American songbirds were grounded in community education, scientific data collection, and fostering a strong moral appreciation among young people for the beauties and realities of the natural world. While the millenary threat was successfully addressed through the 1901 Lacey Act, the core activities of the Society, with a broadening focus on all birds *and* their habitats, would continue into the local Audubon Society’s mid-century reinvention and well beyond.

The Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, which would remain independent from the federated National Audubon Society headquartered in New York City, played a defining role in mid-century conservation activity that sparked a global movement. The organization itself found new life during this time, specifically during the waning days of World War II through the mid-to-late 1960s. The Society was reinvigorated not only by increased numbers of members, reflective of the population moving to the Washington area throughout the 1940s primarily for government work, but also because of the specific skills and deep and steadying connection to the natural world that the newcomers brought with them. Men and women from rural communities, towns, and cities, suddenly without ties to family and community, flocked to clubs and interest-based organizations that promised new connections and provided exciting social and recreational activities. The local Audubon Society (AS) offered additional benefits: serious but informal educational opportunities and a chance to connect with their new home itself—the land, water, and abundant life found all around the D.C. area, increasingly and especially within natural areas in lower Montgomery County.

New members and leaders of the AS, including Irston Barnes, Roger Tory Peterson, Louis Halle, Edwin Way Teale, Shirley Briggs, and Rachel Carson, all of whom were smitten with the world outdoors since childhood, came to the Society with an abundance of skills honed in their professional lives as economists, biologists, editors, and visual artists with the federal government. The organization's prestigious connections within Washington circles, including with the National Museum (later called the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History), and its historic membership, which included scholars and esteemed naturalists like Alexander Wetmore, Florence Merriam and Vernon Bailey, John Aldrich, Paul Bartsch, William Vogt, and Millicent Todd Bingham, among others, added to an allure for the newcomers, despite previous waning membership and declining educational and field opportunities through the end of the war.

Eager for new friendships and connections, perpetually interested in expanding their own understanding, and having a desire to nourish their sense of wonder within the natural world, the ambitious new Auduboners found themselves in a region that was both unexpectedly bursting with wildlife and beauty and in the beginning stages of a period of massive modernization—both urbanization and suburbanization—that threatened their source of profound enjoyment.

Field Excursions

The new flock of AS members were eager for social activity and exploration of the region's natural mysteries. With many of the Auduboners moving to the area during and after the war for work in the federal government or associated industries, these young and active out-of-towners found their way to the organization first through its successful, regular programming that included bird walks, hikes, and other outdoor excursions, taking advantage of the surprising beauty that was to be found in and around Washington, D.C. Throughout this time and well into the 1950s, the C&O Canal in Montgomery County was a focal point of Society activity. Often, trips occurring several times each month would meet at specific canal locks along the Towpath or popular spots like the Anglers Inn. Birding walks were the primary draw for Society members along the canal, but the locale also played a role in Audubon institutional and educational programming objectives, providing a place for member meetings, natural history talks, and even a prospective headquarters at one C&O lockhouse.²

Shirley Briggs (1918-2004), an Interior Department artist from Iowa, joined countless Audubon trips in the years before she became a Society board member and paid staff. Briggs was initially introduced to the group through a new office friend, who within a few decades would be considered the "mother of the environmental movement." Briggs wrote, "Rachel Carson, the aquatic biologist in the department, is especially nice. We are both hiking enthusiasts—and she is very interested in birds too," adding, the next month, "Rachel Carson persuaded me to join the Audubon Society—they have some interesting weekend expeditions planned."³ Briggs's letters and diaries contain high-level accounts of these field excursions, both formal and informal, which in the years and decades following have come to offer a sense of her personal life, specifics of Audubon programs, and the natural history of the time. For example, in May 1947, Briggs reported several birding walks with Rachel ("Ray") Carson and sometimes Carson's mother along sections of the C&O Canal.

May 4: met Ray, Dorothy, and Mrs. C at 6:45—and off to Great Falls. Had splendid luck, many unusual warblers, rough-winged swallows, vireos, indigo bunting.

May 10: with Ray to Seneca, thinking to meet the Auduboners there, but none came. Cold but delightful morning, and that stretch of towpath as fabulous as reputed. Saw 41 kinds of birds, ever so many indigo buntings, tangers (sic), and I saw the prothonotary warbler, Met two other people with binoculars, one of whom turned out to be Mr. Halle himself, and as delightful as his boo[k] would indicate.

May 11: meeting Halle at Seneca, with Rachel after reading Spring in Washington.

Louis Halle's popular book *Spring in Washington* featured the natural areas along the Towpath between Pennyfield and Seneca, an area that Briggs described as being, in 1947, "reached only by primitive dirt roads in good weather."⁴ Halle himself became a board member of the local Audubon and a friend of Rachel Carson.

Data Collection and Scientific Study

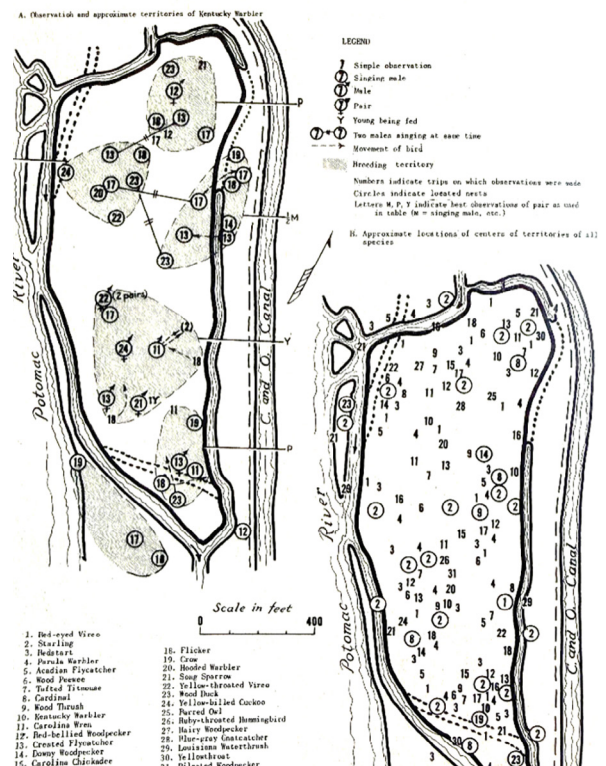
Certain Audubon excursions demonstrated aims that went beyond recreation. Since its earliest days, the Society maintained lists of bird species identified in the immediate area, and engaged in nationwide and regional bird count days, such as the Christmas Bird Count and Big Day Trip. In the mid-1940s bird counts and studies became a more pronounced activity for the organization and more rigorous, scientific approaches were implemented.

A concerted effort to count and track breeding-birds⁵ in a consistent location began in 1946 with the Society's study in Glen Echo between Sycamore Island and the Minnehaha Branch of the Potomac. The following year, the AS moved its study location slightly upstream to focus on 18.75 acres of "mature deciduous flood plain forest" on Cabin John Island (between the Potomac River and the C&O Canal) and added a second location the following year in an upland hardwood forest in Rock Creek Park (D.C.). The early breeding-bird work was shaped and aided by expert Society members such as ornithologist Chan Robbins. The array of sophisticated studies helped determine total population counts locally and across the country, while offering the participant an "excellent method for becoming better informed on the identification, habits, and status" of local birds. With the addition of bald eagle surveys in the mid-1950s, the Society was able to establish trend data that would be used to determine species declines throughout the region, foundational for future conservation efforts.⁶

Educational Programs

With talented writers and artists as core members of the Society, outreach and education came naturally to the organization and would represent some of its most successful and impactful activities during the mid-century period. Children's programming continued to evolve during this time, with less emphasis on school curricula and stocking libraries with the latest natural history books; instead, focusing more on the educational and recreational opportunities through its popular Junior Audubon club, whose annual Christmas party could boast an attendance of 200 children.⁷ The Society also continued a scholarship program that included a formal nomination and selection process, awarding a local youth funding to attend an Audubon summer camp in Maine.

18.75 Acres, Cabin John Island, Maryland, 1948



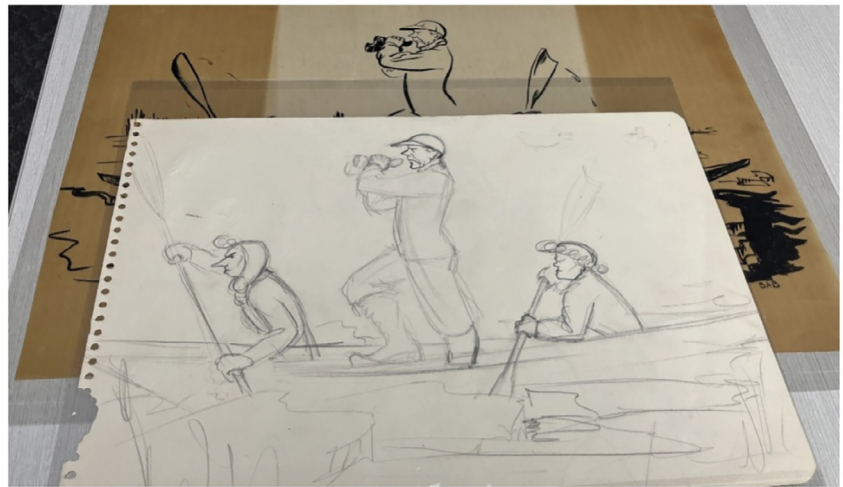
Breeding bird study at Cabin John Island, 1948.
(Smithsonian Archives)

For adults, the Society provided a regular schedule of seminars and films for nature enthusiasts and budding naturalists alike, featuring some of the most notable scientists and leading voices on the natural world. While these programs kept members (and a sliver of the public) informed and engaged in a social manner, their reach was limited to those who could attend mostly evening events, often held at the National Museum in Washington, D.C. AS also launched its Natural History Field School (later the Natural History Field Studies program with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School) in 1956, serving those who sought a deeper level of competence in a wide range of naturalist studies.⁸

Beginning in 1946, the Society embarked on a project that would quickly become a fundamental expression of its mission: the bimonthly publication of an AS-written and curated journal.

Educational Outreach in Print

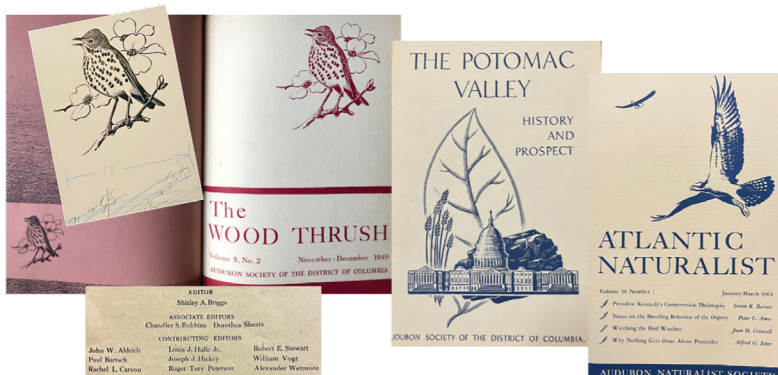
That publication, titled *The Wood Thrush*, was edited by a team of member volunteers, many of whom were biologists and information specialists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In its early years, the journal was edited primarily by Shirley Briggs, Dorothea Sheats, and Chan Robbins, with support from Rachel Carson, Louis Halle, Roger Tory Peterson, and other associate editors. The publication shared data collected from nature walks and bird counts and featured in-depth information about birds in the region, such as a breeding pair of veeries in upper Rock Creek Park. By 1949, however, both the success of *The Wood Thrush* and a growing sense among AS leadership that even more could be accomplished through its pages led to a reimagining of its purpose.



Sketches by Shirley Briggs depicting herself (left), Roger Tory Peterson, and Rachel Carson. Date unknown. (Iowa Women's Archive)

Acknowledging that the time was ripe for a truly regional journal to take advantage of the “great activity in study of natural sciences in this area and much technical material of great value [being] buried in government bulletins,” the board of the AS of D.C., with Briggs, Carson, and Peterson in attendance, decided to rename its publication and widen its reach. Uncharacteristically attending the Audubon board meeting three months in a row in late 1949/early 1950, Carson moved to name the former *Wood Thrush* publication the “Atlantic Naturalist,” not the “Mid-Atlantic Bird Life” previously recommended by the committee assigned to suggest a new name. Louis Halle seconded the motion, which passed, 7 to 4.^{9,10} From 1950 through 1976, the *Atlantic Naturalist*, eventually moving from five issues each year to four, provided readers with information that deepened their knowledge of local natural history and insights that brought an awareness to

emerging and ongoing conservation issues in the region and, in the case of synthetic pesticides, far beyond.



A sample of Society publications. At left, a Wood thrush by Roger Tory Peterson, used as the emblem of the journal during the late 1940s.

Beyond the pages of the Society's journal, Irston Barnes, assistant chief economist of the Federal Trade Commission and AS president, took the Audubon message to his *Washington Post* column “The Naturalist,” published on a weekly or biweekly schedule beginning in January 1952. The column was another mouthpiece of the Society, furthering the organization's educational outreach by

teaching birding identification techniques, sharing bird count data, recommending top natural history field guides, and encouraging exploration of the beauty all around, especially portions of the C&O Canal in Montgomery County.

By 1953, while always maintaining his nature education bent, Barnes would begin to alert the *Post*-reading public to impending infrastructure projects that threatened the same precious natural wonders that he had recommended they visit and learn about. Focusing on the C&O Canal and the upper Rock Creek Park into Maryland throughout the rest of the 1950s, Barnes's "Naturalist" columns followed a consistent approach of first extolling the wonders of a specific natural area and then, when necessary, making the reader aware of the threats it was facing.

Defining a Conservation Philosophy

The mid-century work of the local Audubon, which in 1959 changed its name to the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States to reflect its growing ambitions in reach and ecological focus, was steadied by a philosophy that centered man with nature and a perspective towards the flourishing of all. During this period, the aim was more about perspective, values, responsibility, and what it meant to be a "community of the whole man," than it was about encouraging new laws and regulation.

Like many of the local Auduboners, President Irston Barnes was a deep thinker and an eager writer. Through the pages of the *Atlantic Naturalist*, as well as his column in *The Washington Post*, Barnes considered the higher goals of the Society's work and, with readers in tow, distilled what would represent a philosophy that accurately described and continued to guide its larger meaning.¹¹ The philosophy also encapsulated the professional work and legacies of its most effective members and leaders at the time, including Peterson, Briggs, and Carson.



THE AUDUBON HIGHROAD

"The Audubon Highroad," *Atlantic Naturalist* 15(4): 231-271, 1960.

Beginning in 1952, the *Atlantic Naturalist* treated the subject of "conservation" as a primary point of discussion and focus. Near the front of every issue, Barnes's "Perspectives" essays brought readers' attention to pressing topics ("Crisis at Cape May," "A Lost Opportunity at Soldiers' Home Grounds," "The C&O Canal Highway") but through 1973, the topic most revisited again and again was that of introspective purpose, philosophy, and ethics ("Experiencing Nature," "Man's Ethics and Nature's Laws," "Why is a Conservationist," "The Concept of an Audubon Society"). In 1960, Barnes put a name to what he and his Society colleagues had preached and practiced for the past decade and a

half: The Audubon Highroad. The Highroad, as Barnes defined it, was the overarching "why" and "how" of the AS. It was an approach that sought to make the connections between all life on earth visible, tangible, and sustaining. The Highroad was a specific journey to be experienced, full of wonder and realities; a process of reconnecting with nature that led from enjoyment to curiosity to understanding to, eventually, awe.¹²

The foundation of this work advocated for a life that was fully aware of one's place, whether it be in a riverine park, a rapidly developing county, or a web of life. Barnes explained:

- : Out of the delight that comes from a visit to the sea coast, a teeming marshland, an unspoiled forest, a bright
- : mountain meadow, or even a fine city park, comes first an awareness of the richly varied plant and animal life that
- : adapts itself to every living condition, and then a curiosity to understand the roles and interrelationships that unite
- : all forms of life.¹³

While this was an ultimate goal in itself, the Highroad would also develop a citizen who would see his or her responsibility within the world. Barnes wrote in another essay:

- : At this stage natural laws take on the stature of moral principles, and the individual is a full-fledged and intelligent
- : conservationist, with a wisdom based on personal experience and an understanding of the true requirements for
- : safeguarding and increasing all natural resources.

Finally, and *precisely* where Rachel Carson would seek to spend her energy at the end of her life,¹⁴ the Highroad prioritized the holistic well-being of the next generation. It was the movement's responsibility:

... to help young people to find the beginning of the Audubon highroad, confident that they will travel fast and far when once their eyes have been opened to the natural world. Many, we hope, will become self trained in the elements of the scientific method and go on to devote their adult lives to some branch of the life sciences; others, we know, will find along the Audubon highroad the balance needed to live healthy and happy lives amidst the tensions of the business, political and social world in which most of their days must be spent."



Three of a series of photographs showing a young boy (left, at bottom) and Rachel Carson at the Potomac River at Great Falls. Rachel Carson personal photo album. Date printed as November 1960. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Archives, Shepherdstown, WV)

Making a Home in Montgomery County

By the end of the 1960s, the Society had formalized its deep relationship with Montgomery County by moving from its small, rented headquarters-and-bookshop building in Georgetown to a permanent home in Chevy Chase. In 1967 the organization acquired the property through a gift from Mrs. Marion Wells, a Society member since 1955. With forty acres and a historic mansion designed by John Russell Pope, the estate known as "Woodend" would allow for an expanded nature education program, especially for children. It was a fitting location for many reasons, not least of which was the familiarity many of the Society members and leadership had with upper Rock Creek in Maryland, both enjoying it on excursions over many decades and advocating for its protection from roadbuilding.

Having a permanent home would transform the impact of the Society. Several noteworthy events occurred in the decade following the move to Woodend, including:

- Establishment of the Rachel Carson Trust for the Living Environment by former work and Audubon colleagues in 1965, a year and a half after Carson's death at age fifty-six. Shirley Briggs was the primary force behind the Trust's establishment and appropriately, given her longtime friendship and work with Carson, became its first Executive Director in 1970. John George, biologist for USFWS and Penn State who conducted many of key significant studies on DDT and wildlife impact, was its first president. An organization founded as a clearinghouse for scientists and laymen, providing up-to-date information about synthetic pesticides, the Trust would be based out of an office at Woodend for decades.
- Establishment of the North American Bluebird Society. In the late 1970s, the Eastern bluebird population continued to struggle after steep declines, primarily due to habitat loss and insecticide use. U.S. Department of Agriculture biochemist and bluebird conservationist Lawrence Zeleny (1904-1995), with the support of Mary Janetatos of the Audubon Naturalist Society, held a three-day conference at Woodend to discuss the problem faced by the species. The conference marked the founding of the North American Bluebird Society, which would be incorporated in 1978 and headquartered in Silver Spring.

- Publication of *Beautiful Swimmers*, by William W. Warner (1920-2008), a government worker first in the Foreign Service and later with the Smithsonian Institution, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1977. As *The New York Times* reported a few years later, Warner, whose bestseller was published just before he turned sixty, had “realized ... the ‘benign and beautiful’ waters of the Chesapeake were his natural setting and that the watermen he had come to admire, and the crab he had come to adore, were his natural heroes.” *Beautiful Swimmers* told both the natural history of the Atlantic blue crab and the human history of those whose livelihoods depended on the species. The popularity of the book effectively “put the Chesapeake Bay on the national agenda,” from a conservation perspective.¹⁵ Warner wrote his book “in a closet-size hideaway” at the Woodend mansion in Chevy Chase, a place with which he was familiar as a board member of the Society and Rachel Carson Trust.

Shirley Briggs (1918-2004)

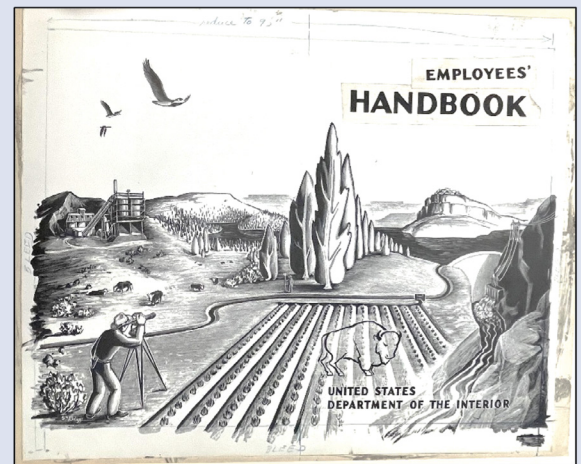
Born and educated in Iowa, Shirley Briggs first moved to Maryland in 1943 to work as an artist and illustrator for Glenn Martin Aircraft in Middle River. Two years later, she was hired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and was placed in an office next door to Rachel Carson’s in the Main Interior Building in Washington, D.C. After the war ended, Briggs was transferred to the Bureau of Reclamation, where she led all graphics work.

Like many of those who would further a conservation ethos in her place and time, Briggs’s social life was a reflection of her interest in the natural world. As her diaries from the decades demonstrate, Shirley Briggs had a busy calendar, filled with evening and weekend activities that included bird walks along the C&O Canal (at Great Falls, Seneca, Widewater, and beyond), garden tours in Georgetown, and museum visits and lectures, many of which were organized by the Audubon Society. Parties held at her apartment or the homes of other members were full of levity, mischief, and gossip, with guests from overlapping federal and Audubon worlds. As her role within AS became more formalized, with Briggs joining the board of directors in 1948, the work of the organization was increasingly demanding on her time. From the late 1940s through much of the 1960s, Shirley Briggs became the Society’s backbone and thus a driving force of the programs and publications that came to influence the conservation movement in Montgomery County, Washington, D.C., and nationally.

As they both became regular participants in Society excursions, Carson encouraged Briggs to become more involved.

... February 9, 1947: Ray Carson called to see whether I’d approve going to some Audubon meetings for a change—
... we might as well give them a try.¹⁶

Briggs approved of Society meetings to such an extent that within the year, she and Carson were serving on the Board of Directors. Over her board tenure, Shirley Briggs was a dependable meeting attendee, unlike Carson or Roger Tory Peterson, whose literary successes often correlated with their absences. Briggs quickly found her niche: overseeing *The Wood Thrush* and its successor, *Atlantic Naturalist*. She served in this capacity, eventually being paid for her work, through 1969. Among the many articles that Briggs wrote herself or was especially intent on publishing were those related to synthetic chemical pesticides.¹⁷ Ornithologist Joseph Hickey, who studied under conservationist and wildlife ecologist Aldo Leopold, noted that “Miss Briggs has probably been the most active of all American editors in attempting to educate her readers in the complex problem of pesticide-wildlife relationships.”¹⁸ Her developing interest and expertise in the issue would prove timely: In early 1958, as Carson began shaping the idea of what would become *Silent Spring*, Briggs wrote in her diary, “Talked to Rachel ... she [is] all up in arms about the insecticide menace. One of the occasions when I could pass on a few facts and leads to her.”¹⁹



Draft of Department of Interior Employees' Handbook, Artwork by Shirley Briggs, Undated. (Iowa Women's Archive, University of Iowa)

While she continued to work government jobs through most of the 1950s, including designing and painting the National Museum's diorama on the extinct Carolina parakeet, Shirley Briggs's career was transformed by her connection to the Society. The demands of her *Atlantic Naturalist* duties (often caused by the high expectations that she herself set), as well as the opportunities and challenges that faced the natural areas within the rapidly urbanizing and suburbanizing region, shaped the course of Briggs' life. Those factors, in addition to the long-lasting relationships she made with the Society's members and its connections to the global naturalist community, including elected officials, scientists, writers, and artists, placed her in a defining moment for U.S. conservation history.



Photos and holiday card design by Shirley Briggs.
(Iowa Women's Archive, University of Iowa)

Following Rachel Carson's death in the spring of 1964, much of Briggs's professional career would be spent ensuring and substantiating Rachel Carson's historic legacy and acting on Carson's wish that an organization be made to gather, house, and share information about pesticides with the public and scientific community.²⁰ Shirley Briggs felt a certain responsibility to save historical artifacts relating to Carson's life and work and tell her story. Briggs became an ardent, unambiguous defender of Carson's public image in media of all sorts, from setting records straight in personal correspondence to major biographies and movie scripts.²¹ Furthermore, Briggs's own letters, diaries, photographs, and sketches capturing her friendship with Carson since 1945 have also made a significant impact on scholarly and popular understanding of Rachel Carson's life and work.

Shirley Briggs and other former Carson colleagues founded the Rachel Carson Trust for the Living Environment in late 1965. For over two decades from Chevy Chase and Bethesda, her job leading the Rachel Carson Trust comprised institution building, fundraising, and "keeping track of poisoning that reaches us from pesticides, and explaining it to victims."²²

In early 1965, Briggs bought a house at 7605 Honeywell Lane, Bethesda, where she would live until 2002.²³ After settling in her home, Briggs moved her mother in from Iowa. Briggs was an active member of Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church located at 6601 Bradley Boulevard in Bethesda and contributed to the congregation's greater focus on both the wonder and vulnerability of God's creation, even occasionally speaking from the pulpit. From her Bethesda living room, she also continued to teach conservation history courses through the Society, giving her a lasting connection to a new generation of local naturalists and conservationists.



Carolina parakeet diorama, U.S. National Museum, c. 1956. Background painted by Shirley Briggs.
(Close up image of diorama from Maryland Biodiversity Project/ Danny Poet)

A Changing Landscape: The C&O Canal, Rock Creek, and Parkland Under Threat

Modern environmentalism grew in response to monumental highway building, an activity that was as integral to midcentury modernity, prosperity, and progress as any other major advancement at the time. As the federal government built multilane road projects across the country that connected many communities to new opportunities, highway building in the District and Montgomery County threatened existing urban neighborhoods and slivers of natural areas that had managed to survive (or been partially rewilded during) centuries of earlier development. Montgomery County parkland controlled by the National Park Service and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission were threatened repeatedly and often successfully by roadbuilding. Public efforts supported by the local Audubon Society to stop the destruction of natural areas in Montgomery County in the name of progress proved inspirational and instructive for the new conservation movement nationwide.



William O. Douglas and the remaining members of the “Blister Brigade,” greeted by Interior Secretary Douglas McKay sitting at the C&O Canal Lock 5, Bethesda. *Washington Post Times-Herald*, March 28, 1954.

The C&O Canal and its Wonder-filled Towpath

The western and southwestern edges of Montgomery County, the majority of which is made up of the Potomac River, is a physiographic and hydrologic wonder. As the river winds its way from the southern tip of the Western Maryland panhandle, eventually carving the southern border of the state west of the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac enters Montgomery County after it meets with the Monocacy River and continues until joined by several tributaries including Seneca Creek and Rock Creek, the latter headwatered near Laytonsville. In Montgomery County, the

entirety of the Potomac, falling from the Piedmont Plateau to the Atlantic Coastal Plain, is paralleled by the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal, which itself is accompanied by a towpath, originally intended to support the mules and horses that pulled barges on the canal. Once the canal’s formal operations ceased in 1924, the towpath became an ideal mode for walkers and birdwatchers, fishermen, and more to experience the up-close beauty of the Potomac while on flatter, relatively even and dry ground. Areas downstream from Great Falls were especially popular after the federal government acquired the canal and utilized the Civilian Conservation Corps to rewater it beginning at Seneca, restoring many of the locks and the towpath in county locations including Great Falls, Violettes Lock, and Cabin John. By the late 1940s, despite the effects of flooding and relative neglect, it was no accident that so many nature lovers found themselves drawn to the drama and serenity of the region and, after years of running its own programming on the canal, that the Audubon Society members would come to its defense.

A flash point and highly recognizable event in mid-century conservation history was the 1954 walk led by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas along the towpath of the C&O Canal. The “protest hike,” as it is recalled in popular memory,²⁴ covered 189 miles of the towpath, about thirty-six of which were in Montgomery County, including the most populated and popular portions of the canal. The genesis of the walk was a *Washington Post* editorial written in support of the proposed “Potomac Parkway,” the new roadway to be built by the National Park Service on or adjacent to the canal as a means, according to *The Post*, of “open[ing] up the greatest scenic asset in this area—the Potomac River—to wider public enjoyment.”²⁵ A few weeks later, Justice Douglas penned a response to the writer of *The Post* editorial, opposing the parkway proposal and inviting him on a walk along the canal. As the walk featured a sitting justice, popular newspapermen, and dramatic landscapes, news of its purpose and progress made for a sensational journey appreciated throughout the nation.

Audubon Awareness

However, ardent opposition to the 1951 proposal for a C&O Canal parkway had already begun with an article published in *The Post* on January 11, 1953, by AS President Irston Barnes,²⁶ in which he laid out many of the key arguments that would inform Douglas's walk over a year later. The C&O Canal, asserted Barnes, was one of the last remaining opportunities for residents and visitors to the region to be "tuned into nature." Chief among his concerns was that the destruction of this natural and historic asset would stifle the community's access to a veritable wonderland, disconnecting them from a source of personal comfort and strength.

Barnes's piece was not written in isolation; it was part of his regular column, "The Naturalist," and one of several that he was writing at the time about the encroachment of highways on the remaining natural areas in the D.C. suburbs, particularly the canal and the upper reaches of Rock Creek Park in Montgomery County.

Most often he voiced his opposition to the parkway by writing about the marvels to be experienced along the towpath. Beginning in April 1952, Barnes brought news of the season's migration, the "feathered emissaries of spring," while noting the other sights and sounds along the canal.²⁷

- More and more people are discovering the charms of the historic waterway, a truly unique national park. From Georgetown to Cumberland, one can walk along the old towpath, with the rushing river on one side and woods and fields on the other, botanizing, birding, or just walking as fits the mood... [with attention to] the spring flowers, whether garlic mustard or may apples, or to the recurring miracle of unfolding leaves and flowering trees.

It was not only his adoration of nature that Barnes shared, but also his desire to educate. For example, he taught how one may easily distinguish among the songs of this region's "mimics" (mockingbird, brown thrasher, catbird) and gave instructions on what to look for and where for the season's migrating warblers along the canal—"the black-throated green (with golden cheeks), the black-throated blue (in formal dress), and the black-poll (black top of head and white cheek) should be sought in the tree-tops." With photographs provided by Roger Tory Peterson and drawings by Shirley Briggs, he familiarized readers with the diversity of life and activity to be found when walking the towpath.

In May 1952, "The Naturalist" reported the bounty identified during an annual bird count around the region. "The most remarkable achievement came from Seneca: there all eight of the eastern flycatchers were identified." And subtly educating on conservation achievements: "Along the coast, 17 species of shorebirds were added to the composite list. It has been gratifying through the years to watch these birds recover as they have been removed from the list of gamebirds."²⁸

The *Atlantic Naturalist* beginning in these earliest years of its publication, primed its readers to think like ecologists. In his piece "Birds Seek Habitats to Fit Specific Needs," Barnes noted that Pileated woodpeckers "disappear ... from an environment when it no longer satisfies his critical requirements." He also connected creatures to their habitats:

- If we want to listen to a wood thrush, we go to lowland woods; if we want to hear an ovenbird call "teacher," we go to upland deciduous woods. If we visit pine woods we expect to hear pine warblers singing like musical chipping sparrows, but if we seek the brown-head-ed nuthatch, we must go to the loblolly pines.²⁹

In addition to his *Post* column, Irston Barnes described his concern for the fate of the canal and towpath through meetings and publications of the Society. He alerted fellow board members to the "new threat...being made to put an express highway between Washington and Cumberland, Maryland along the C&O Canal." While Barnes advocated for letters of concern to be written to Maryland lawmakers he also proposed, typical of his passion for education, that copies of the Society's natural history booklet, "The Potomac Valley," be sent to each member of the legislature.



Washington Post, January 11, 1953.

In May 1953 in direct response to rampant plans for large-scale highway building projects, Shirley Briggs, with the support of Barnes and AS educational program volunteers, opened a “most ambitious and most effective” temporary exhibit at the Smithsonian’s National Museum with the explicit intention of making the public “aware of the unique values of [the region’s] several park and natural areas.” Extending its impact beyond the walls of the museum, portions of the show were exhibited and presented throughout communities in the region and a publication was printed that reflected a majority of the exhibit materials. As Barnes later noted, the exhibit and publication combined to prove “effective instruments in arousing the public to oppose the building of a highway on the historic C&O Canal from Washington to Cumberland.”^{30,31}

During the same time, AS leadership organized a meeting of more than fifty individuals and representatives of parties concerned for the natural areas at risk from the parkway project. The result was the formation of the Potomac Valley Conservation and Recreation Council, charged with keeping member organizations informed about threats to the canal and surrounding areas and advocating for related conservation policies, with Barnes as its chair.^{32,33}

Douglas’s “Protest Hike” for Conservation Values

With local reporters accepting his invitation to walk the canal towpath, Justice Douglas became the public face of the upcoming hike. Meanwhile, the conservation community supported his endeavor in the background, providing planning and coordination as well as some of their own men for the hike itself. Government media relations specialist Jack Durham, through his work on behalf of the Wilderness Society, was credited as the walk’s lead organizer, with assistance from biologist and director of the Wilderness Society Olaus Murie. Barnes publicized the hike in his *Post* column and was an original member of the party, providing, as was noted by a reporter, “ornithological information” and assuming responsibility for keeping a log of species seen along the entirety of the canal.³⁴

While Justice Douglas understood the power of publicity in drawing attention to an important cause, the center of what would become a media spectacle was far from what we today may consider a “protest hike.” At its most fundamental, the Douglas–*Washington Post Times-Herald* Hike, as it was called at the time, was an opportunity for education and a shared experience of the wonders of the natural world. For his part, Douglas sought to open the newspapermen’s eyes, making each “a new man,” a transformation that would be impossible if journeying by car.

: He would get to know muskrats, badgers, and fox; he would hear the roar of wind in thickets; he would see
: strange islands and promontories through the fantasy of fog; he would discover the glory there is in the first flower
: of spring, the glory there is even in a blade of grass; the whistling wings of ducks would make silence have new
: values for him.³⁵

As much of Douglas’s deep familiarity of and palpable yearning for life outdoors was inspired by his upbringing in the Pacific Northwest, these sentiments had been nurtured by the natural areas of the Washington, D.C. region. He was a man in love with the life and beauty along the C&O Canal, particularly in the sections of Montgomery County, and wanted not only to stop the planned destruction of a place he revered but also to share that reverence with the newspapermen and the public they could inspire.

On March 20, Aubrey Graves and Merlo Pusey of *The Washington Post* and thirty-four others, including leaders of national conservation groups and several young Boy Scouts, joined Justice Douglas at Cumberland for the organized trek downstream to Washington. While supporters and detractors came out to see the walkers along their path, this was not a public march. A curated list of male-only invitees made up the hiking party, quickly self-described as the “Blister Brigade,” but the number dwindled to only nine participants by the final day.³⁶

Along the way, Graves and Pusey wrote about their experiences, describing an overall convivial atmosphere among participants, despite the growing aches of their feet. The men also noticed that they were indeed marveling in this time outdoors.

: Out here the first signs of spring seem far more important than the antics of self-inflated wild men or what
: Congress does with the tax bill. Our interest centers on the call of the birds, the quiet flow of the river, the chatter
: of carefree men and the mountains of food daily consumed. ... It is good to renew one’s contacts with nature.³⁷

Douglas himself succeeded in completing the hike and in drawing national attention to a conservation matter of which the general public may have otherwise been entirely ignorant. Despite approvals and authorizations to develop a parkway on the dilapidated historic canal, the Douglas trek generated the right concern at the right time to help thwart the government's roadbuilding aspirations, eventually leading to the 1971 passage of The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Act to effectively preserve the canal and its traversable towpath in perpetuity.

Part of the hike's success was also thanks to the local conservation community, who would continue advocating for the permanent protection of the canal system into the early 1970s. Soon after the conclusion of the hike, Barnes wrote a full-page piece in *The Washington Post* laying out with clarity for all to understand the context regarding the roadbuilding proposal, the hike's specific objective, and several details about the event itself, including a simple-but-effective map and a section on the "Fine Scenery" that mentioned aspects of the wild wonders—migrating warblers and ancient sea fossils in stone—that were observed over the course of the eight days. In short, the article distilled for the reading public highlights from the walk that were important, particularly from the conservationist's point of view.³⁸ It made Douglas's endeavor and message clear and accessible.³⁹ Celebrating the wildlife and scenic beauty, while pushing back against the argument made by government officials that the canal and towpath were not valuable as a natural area because it was "not wilderness," Barnes wrote an accompanying story for the *Audubon Naturalist* entitled "Natural Value Clear All Along Canal Area." The piece continued his practice—and the foundation of his Audubon Society's work at the time—of educating his readers about the values of protecting natural spaces and shared natural history information, in this case about the patterns of succession, habitats, and species seen along the Canal hike, and the geology of the Canal area.⁴⁰

Though the work would continue in the following years, outreach before and after the C&O Canal hike would represent a major expression of an ethos that had been generating within the local Audubon Society for several years, developed and nurtured by Irston Barnes, Roger Tory Peterson, Louis Halle, Shirley Briggs, and Rachel Carson and others that assumed leadership positions within the Society since the mid- to late-1940s. Undoubtedly, though, the smart, charismatic, deeply perceptive Douglas demonstrated that public action could garner the attention desperately needed by an environment at risk.

Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996)

The famed naturalist, artist, and author of the Peterson Field Guides, Roger Tory Peterson was an integral AS member during the period when the organization seemed to beam with energy and new ideas. Peterson ventured to Cape Charles, Hawk Mountain, and other post-war field trip locations, strategized with fellow board members, and contributed his artistic talents on occasion, most notably in painting the emblem for the newly revised Society journal, *The Wood Thrush*.⁴¹ While "long known as an eminent artist with brush and pencil," Peterson also came to be regarded as a passionate conservationist whose perceptiveness extended beyond the canvas.⁴²

Moving during the war from New York to serve in the Army as part of the Corps of Engineers, Peterson brought with him a strong artistic talent, specifically in painting and photographing birds, and experience in nature education through employment with the National Audubon Society. He was also author of a wildly successful field guide, which was already in its second edition by the time he arrived in the Washington, D.C. region. The "Peterson Guide," as *The Field Guide to the Birds, Giving Field Marks of All Species Found in Eastern North America* (1934) was known among birders, was a revolution in bird books, accessible at its price of \$2.75 and a handy size to carry while hiking. It also presented something new to the wider public: the Peterson "system." This method was a way of seeing and identifying a bird based on a few specific details—field marks—that could be noticed from a distance. The bird's movement and activity did not distract from a proper identification; instead, it aided in it. Peterson included "patterns of light and dark and other features related to the shape and activity of the bird,"⁴³ making the creature recognizable even in less-than-ideal conditions.

Not unlike several civilian and military servicepeople who would later become engaged naturalists and committed conservationists, Roger Tory Peterson was witness to some of the earliest experiments with the synthetic chemical insecticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT), helping to carry out Army studies examining the chlorinated



Peterson Bird Walk near Canal, March 1951, by J. Donald Sutherland. Bottom image showing Roger Tory Peterson and Irston Barnes. An AS member and amateur cinematographer, Sutherland wrote that he made these enlargements from a 16mm Kodachrome cinema film.

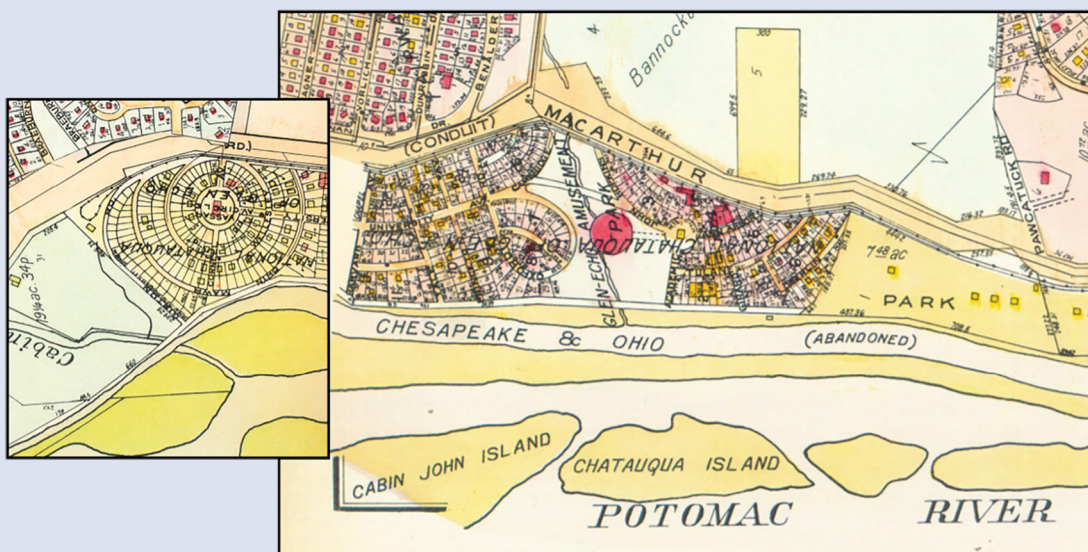
mainstay of AS programming.⁴⁶ Irston Barnes, Audubon Society of D.C. President from 1946 to 1961 and Chairman of the Board from 1961-1968, credited Peterson as among key figures who determined “bigger” goals for the organization, expanding beyond a focus on birds to include “the ethics of conservation.”

At the conclusion of World War II, Peterson and his family had moved to 42 Wellesley Circle in Glen Echo, a vibrant location for birds and birdwatchers, renting the home from fellow Auduboner Mrs. N. M. Burgess.⁴⁷ The neighborhood sat just inland from the Potomac’s C&O Canal and the chain of river islands that includes Cabin John Island and was, as a neighbor remarked, “long a bird sanctuary and bird migration point.”⁴⁸

hydrocarbon’s impact on bird populations. In separate assignments, his skills as an artist were employed in developing camouflage and a system of aircraft identification, based on the Peterson method of bird identification.

Peterson’s engagement with the local Audubon Society began not long after he moved to the area in 1943. By 1944, Peterson was leading spring bird walks for the AS and served as Guest Speaker at its 1944-1945 Annual Dinner.⁴⁴ He also participated in the Society’s bird counts and census recordings, including at locations along the C&O Canal towpath and specifically at Cabin John Island. From the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s, he became instrumental in making the organization function and flourish, bringing substance to the Society through his prior experience with children’s nature writing and educational programming, and the ability to lead bird walks throughout the region (and particularly along the C&O Canal). He believed in demonstrating how enjoyable nature study could be, exuding, as Shirley Briggs experienced early on, “a delightful sense of quiet fun.” Peterson also wrote for *The Wood Thrush* and *Atlantic Naturalist* and remained a contributing editor for several years.⁴⁵

First elected to the Board of Directors on March 4, 1947, Peterson was an active and reliable board member, serving in roles on the Executive, Policy, and Seminar Committees, the latter through which he helped start the formal Lecture Series that became a



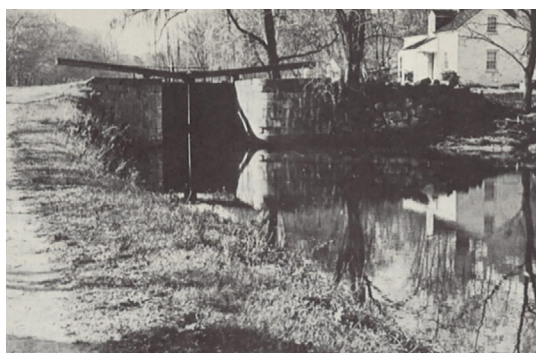
Klinge, Frank H.M., 1953. Glen Echo section of Plates 13 and 14 from Atlas of Montgomery County Maryland, Volume 2 (1949/1953). Roger Tory Peterson lived on Wellesley Cir (far left section; second circle from center).

Exhausted after working long hours in his home studio, Peterson was known to still welcome passersby, often those with an Audubon affiliation, who offered him their observations of life seen along the canal that day. The Peterson family resided for the next ten years in Glen Echo, with Roger later reflecting, “we stayed because we liked the Potomac area so much.”⁴⁹

It was here, near the banks of the Potomac, that Peterson painted late into the night for several commissioned and independent projects and penned his most celebrated work of prose, *Birds Over America* (1948). A book more about the act of birdwatching than a description of birds themselves, *Birds Over America* had an explicit intention, Peterson wrote, to depict the “sport” of birdwatching as one that did not require a person to have deep scientific knowledge, but did rely on fostering an appreciation of how birds lived and the habitats they depended on. While presenting a conservationist message, the book, like most of that era, remained hopeful in mankind’s ability to stave off its destructive practices. The book won Peterson the esteemed John Burroughs Medal in 1950.⁵⁰

During his time living in Glen Echo, Peterson transformed himself from a successful bird artist and naturalist author into one of the country’s most respected voices on the avian world, amplifying a message of the sheer delight that can be found in noticing the birds around us and the importance of safeguarding that enjoyment for future generations. Winning awards for *Birds Over America*, continuing to publish new Peterson Guides, and completing a feature film project, *Wild America*, Peterson’s time in Montgomery County was one of exceptional creativity and productivity. So why did he leave?⁵¹ According to correspondence in 1983 with a former Glen Echo neighbor, the artist and writer wrote that he moved to Connecticut “to have access to both New York (American Museum of Natural History) and Boston where my publisher is located, and at the same time to have the country.” A neighbor and friend later added context to the latter motivation:

- : She explained that they were moving because Mr. Peterson disliked the preparations that were underway to
- : construct the Washington parkway between Glen Echo and the canal, as it would contribute to chasing away the
- : birds. He was right—the parkway has “short changed” the wildlife pattern of the area.⁵²



Atlantic Naturalist, Fall 1955.

The Canal and Parkland Preserved

Justice Douglas’s hike succeeded in drawing attention not only to the issue of roadbuilding along the C&O Canal, but also to the reason for his opposition: the values of both awe-inspiring wildlife and landscape that could be experienced through a stroll on the towpath, on the banks of the Potomac River.⁵³ His efforts were undoubtedly instrumental in the later passage of the C&O National Park Act in 1971, but they were not entirely successful in thwarting highway construction in portions of the canal area. As soon as 1955, one year following the Douglas–*Washington Post Times-Herald* walk, plans were moving forward to build the Maryland section of the George Washington Parkway⁵⁴ along the western/southwestern edge of Montgomery County. Through the 1960s, highway plans retreated from a vision that would transform the entire canal system; instead, they became focused on creating an efficient route that brought motorists into and out of Washington, D.C., while moving the road further inland. Taking their concerns to print, Briggs and Barnes brought attention to the continuing threats upon wildlife habitat along the Potomac. “The Naturalist” column featured several pieces that discussed the canal, including “Highway Plan Plainly Imperils Park Values” in March 1955. Irston Barnes described the coming changes to the towpath experience: with a new roadway so

close, “the physical preservation of the Canal and its towpath means nothing ... no birdwatcher will listen for the morning singing of warblers and vireos or the evensong of thrushes above the hubbub of cars.”⁵⁵ As an alternative, Barnes advocated for improvements to be made to existing arteries, such as MacArthur Boulevard. In a fall 1955 article in the *Atlantic Naturalist*, Barnes and Briggs wrote a profile of the canal focused on key natural areas and birding spots in Montgomery County. Woven into the piece were warnings about the highway plans that would destroy or alter those areas. (See image above by Shirley Briggs showing two areas, including the lockhouse at Lock 5, that would be severely affected by the George Washington/Clara Barton Parkway development over the next decade. Today, there exists about 100 feet between the Parkway and the towpath at Glen Echo; only 150 feet from Peterson’s former home on Wellesley Circle.)

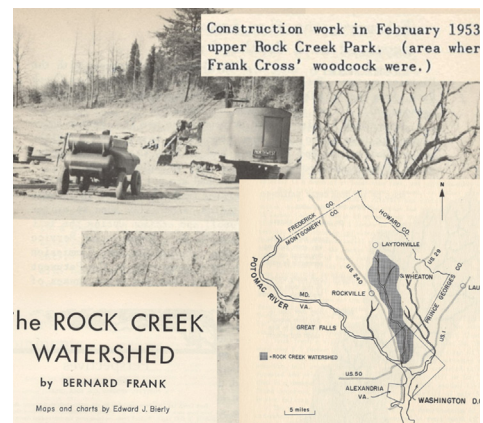
Astonishingly, the parkway was constructed in some of the areas once most noted for their wild beauty and biodiversity: the portion revered by naturalists, like neighborhood resident Roger Tory Peterson, that included Brookmont, Glen Echo, Cabin John, and Carderock. The towpath and canal remained largely intact, but by its completion in the mid-1960s, the parkway had demolished some features, including several historic lockhouses, and had also undeniably severed the vital, seamless connection of water, wildlife, and community.

The area was long a bird sanctuary and bird migration point.
 [Roger Tory Peterson] was right, the parkway has “short changed” the wildlife pattern of the area. Occasionally we all see rare birds in the area, but far less frequently. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Vassar Circle was the scene of a daily trek to the Canal and the Potomac for bird-watchers, many on foot, with their binoculars and cameras. Some parked their cars in front of our property, as there was an open path to the Canal down from the corner of Wellesley Circle and Cornell. This is past history.

— Barbara Peterson as explained to Mrs. J. Manuel Espinosa, August 1983^{56,57}

The Value of Rock Creek

Another conservation flash point in the county, perennially under threat from highway construction, was Rock Creek Park. The Maryland portion, northwest of the District line, was particularly contentious at the same time that Auduboners and other conservation advocates were concerned for the fate of the C&O Canal. In 1953 Irston Barnes penned several columns about the beauty of Rock Creek and the threats being faced by roadbuilding in the Maryland section and winding down into the city. In “Rock Creek Park Seen as Temple” and “Road Planners Miss Natural Park Value,” Barnes insists that constructing U.S. 240 through parts of the Rock Creek stream valley would be detrimental to wildlife, beauty, and a population that needs both to function at its best. Barnes, sharing a short essay by Louis Halle, wrote that Rock Creek Park should inspire lawmakers and government workers and be preserved as a matter of national importance. “Exposure of these elements is essential if men are to keep their contact with ultimate reality... [Rock Creek Park] is there to nourish the vision that justifies the nation.”⁵⁸ He also placed blame for the destructive plans on “single-minded specialists” that are unable to see a bigger picture—a target that appeared in other conservation arguments at the time.⁵⁹



“The Rock Creek Watershed,” Bernard Frank. *Atlantic Naturalist*, September-October 1954. A majority of Rock Creek is in Montgomery County, Maryland.

In the spring of 1954, Rachel Carson gave what is likely her first speech that would incorporate conservation concerns directly. As a writer whose articles, award-winning books, and speeches had thus far been focused on the wonders of the natural world, and in particular the sea, her discussion of an imminent threat to a local natural area was distinct and signaled an evolution, though modest, of the style and substance of her work. Speaking to an audience of 900 women journalists in Columbus, Ohio, Carson marveled at the natural world and described its increasing vulnerability with an example close to home: the efforts underway to build U.S. 240 through Rock Creek Park.

It's a place where one can go, away from the noise of traffic and of man-made confusions, for a little interval of refreshing and restoring quiet—where one can hear the soft water sounds of a stream on its way to river and sea, where the wind flows through the trees, and a veery sings in the green twilight. Now they propose to run a six-lane arterial highway through the heart of that narrow woodland valley—destroying forever its true and immeasurable value to the city and the nation.

Living in Silver Spring and working in the District of Columbia, Carson found endless enjoyment in Rock Creek. She spent countless hours on personal and Audubon excursions in the Rock Creek stream valley and, among its dogwoods and ferns, first heard and saw her favorite and most-beloved bird, the veery. This speech, entitled “The Real World Around Us,” is now regarded as one of her most significant public engagements, a moment where Rachel Carson assumed the role of advocate and spoke out *against* something that threatened a place that she knew well and had come to love.⁶⁰



Max P. Milians, 1954. Publication unknown.
(Smithsonian Archives)

Ultimately, U.S. 240 was not extended through Chevy Chase and into the District, as Maryland Governor Theodore McKeldin barred its construction through the stream valley in late 1954.⁶¹ In 1955, the Rock Creek corridor celebrated its first “Rock Creek Park Day,” organized by local individuals and organizations, including AS, with the intention of bringing public awareness of the park’s unique “values” and benefits offered to the region’s residents. Urging continued protection from potential parkland destruction, the annual “Day” offered events and programming throughout the stream valley, including at the Meadowbrook area of Chevy Chase and even into portions of Silver Spring.⁶² However, upper Rock Creek would continue to face threats of county road and state highway construction. In the early 1960s, the Capital Beltway—a priority of McKeldin’s, despite his earlier desire “to save the Rock Creek Park”—tore through portions of Rock Creek parkland in Montgomery County, irrevocably changing the landscape and permanently fragmenting communities of plants and animals. The section where Auduboner Bernard Frank annually experienced the mating rituals of American woodcock, as he shared with readers of the *Atlantic Naturalist* encouraging them to experience the spectacle for themselves, was effectively obliterated by the Capital Beltway, as was the vibrant valley at Forest Glen where the Society first held birding trips at the turn of the 20th century.

In 1967 and 1968, Shirley Briggs led Auduboners to advocate against the extension of Beach Drive north to Knowles Avenue. While not a large highway, Beach Drive still threatened natural areas of upper Rock Creek, making the area less hospitable for wildlife and less effective at filtering rainwater and managing periodic floods. Along with thirteen other conservation organizations, AS organized educational birdwatching trips and a community hike through the sections to be affected by the extension. Eventually, the riparian roadway was extended to and north of Knowles Ave, but a more expansive proposal to route Beach Drive up to Lake Needwood was abandoned.^{63,64}

Silver Spring's Rachel Carson: A Spark of Wonder and Wisdom

Rachel Louise Carson was born on May 27, 1907, in Springdale, a town sixteen miles upstream on the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Carson family owned sixty-four acres of wooded property and, while money was not steady nor abundant, Carson was enriched through her interest in books, music, and the outdoors, nurtured by her mother, Maria Carson.

After graduating from Pennsylvania Women's College in 1929, Carson moved to Baltimore, Maryland to pursue graduate studies in marine zoology at Johns Hopkins University. Living outside the city at Stemmers Run, close to Middle River, Carson was soon joined by many of her family members, including her parents, sister, and two young nieces. The years before she settled in Silver Spring in 1937 were spent working to support her family (which went from partially to fully dependent on her income after her father died in 1935) by regularly selling stories to *The Baltimore Sun* about the animal life of the Chesapeake Bay. In the same time period, she also completed her master's degree, taught at Hopkins and the University of Maryland, and eventually landed a part-time and then a full-time job with the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries (which, together with the Bureau of Biological Survey, became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940). Rather than spend valuable time and money commuting to College Park, and Washington, D.C. for work, Rachel Carson moved her family to the convenient suburb of Silver Spring, which boasted leafy neighborhoods and good schools for her nieces. In all, Carson was a Maryland resident from 1929 until her death in 1964; a Montgomery County resident 1937-1964. Over these decades and writing mostly from home, Carson would become a beloved science and nature writer with a global readership and an almost prophetic figure that would be widely regarded as "the mother of the modern environmental movement."

Renting in the lower and eastern part of the county, Carson's residences were the following⁶⁵:

1937-1939: 904 Highland Drive, Silver Spring

1939-1943: 9409 Flower Avenue, Silver Spring

1943-1945: 7724 Maple Avenue, Takoma Park

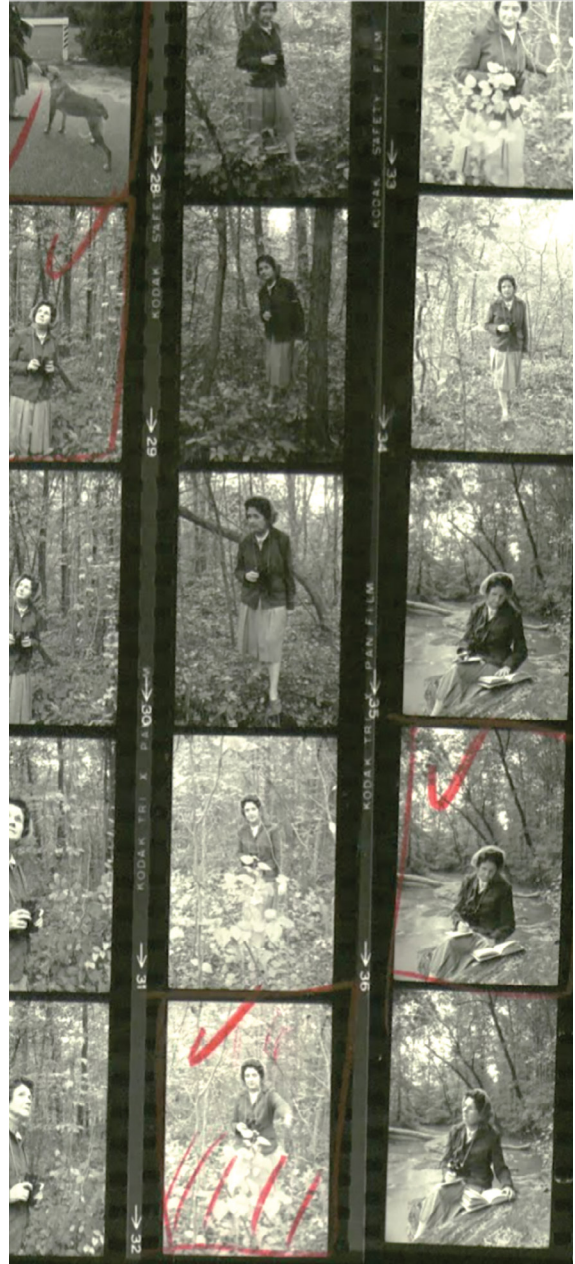
1945-1949: 9713 Sutherland Road, Silver Spring

1949-1957: 204 Williamsburg Drive, Silver Spring

1957-1964: 11701 Berwick Road, Silver Spring

Carson's mother, Maria, lived in each of the houses with her, as did other relatives, including nieces and eventually her grandnephew, Roger Christie, whom she would adopt. She never lived alone.

From her first home in Silver Spring, located just south of Dale Drive at Highland Drive and Colesville Road, Carson was published in her first national magazine,⁶⁶ the *Atlantic Monthly*. A beautiful essay entitled "Undersea" gave readers both a glimpse of life beneath the ocean's surface and of her poetic, scientific nonfiction that would define her style



Rachel Carson along the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, Silver Spring. (Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Time/LIFE*, 1962)



In yellow, location of the two houses where Carson lived and wrote between 1945 and 1957. The house on Sutherland Road (left) would be demolished for the construction of the Capital Beltway, where today runs the on-ramp to I-495 West. The house on Williamsburg Drive remains. (Frank H.M. Klinge, "Atlas of Montgomery County," Volume 1, 1948. Plate 10)

and career as a writer. "To sense this world of waters known to the creatures of the sea," she wrote, "we must shed our human perceptions of length and breadth and time and place, and enter vicariously into a universe of all-pervading water." Hallmarks of the articles and books that would follow, Rachel Carson's four-page piece covered themes of connection and interdependence, deep geologic time, earth's near-eternal rhythms and patterns and its ceaseless recycling of life's component materials—all while sharing both a profound sense of wonder in the natural world and the most recent scientific findings in a manner accessible to a general audience.

Her first book, *Under the Sea-Wind* (1941), was written from her next home, on Flower Avenue. From a residence on Sutherland she began work on a second book. Expanding on the subject and themes of "Undersea," *Under the Sea-Wind* received critical acclaim as beautiful and informative but did not sell more than a few thousand copies. Rachel Carson lived longest at the Williamsburg Drive address, in the Woodmoor neighborhood that is part of Four Corners, Silver Spring, and from there wrote the articles and books that would propel her to the highest levels of literary achievement. On weekends and in evenings after returning from her civil service job in Washington, Carson wrote her most popular book of the 1950s, the National Book Award-winning *The Sea Around Us*, which remained on *The New York Times* bestseller list for eighty-six weeks. *The Sea Around Us* brought a new awareness of the world as one largely controlled by the oceans. It widened the public's lens and deepened what readers could fathom about life on earth. It was inherently an ecological book, as all of her sea books were, sharing the reality of intricate and all-encompassing connection and interdependence that formed essential systems of a living world. Readers were enamored with Carson as a "biographer of the sea," a lyrical interpreter of wonders and realities, and this popularity and trust would prove fundamental to the new and modern environmental consciousness that Carson and her peers were fomenting.

Object of Her Affection Is the Ocean



By Dorothea Cruger
RACHEL L. CARSON, of Silver Spring, Md., is a woman

Washington Post, July 4, 1951

On Williamsburg Drive, too, Carson penned “Help Your Child to Wonder” for *Woman’s Home Companion*, a piece that gave voice to an increasingly important issue for her: the profound importance of nurturing a child’s connection with and wonder in the natural world, regardless of where they live.⁶⁷

Despite its proximity to suburban highways and a modern shopping center, Carson notes in letters to friends that at night she was able to hear birds—her beloved veeries and other thrushes—from the “park” (either the eastern woods between the neighborhood and the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River or the nearby Pinecrest Park⁶⁸). Particularly in the last two decades of her life, Carson’s letters from her Silver Spring residences were abundant with updates about the beauty of the wildlife she could see and hear from inside her home. From her letters alone, one could become well-versed in the natural history of lower Montgomery County.

January 21, 1955: I went to the window in the bathroom—our only upstairs window facing east. ... The moon was just a little above the horizon. And the Star! How blazingly bright and how enormous!

March 13, 1961: This morning began (7 A.M.) with the cries of geese, and I managed to stagger to the window (shouting for Roger to share the excitement) and get it open in time to hear them better and see the dark, shifting column in the grey sky. I don’t think I’ve heard them from this house before. Another “first” yesterday morning—the first robin song of the year, and Saturday we had 2 fox sparrows scratching on the ground under the feeder. They are rare with us. And I thought I heard a Carolina wren.

March 27, 1963: When I got up this morning and made my usual tour of the house, opening and raising blinds, etc., I uttered a loud “Oh!” when I opened the blind of the side study window. One large clump of daffodils is suddenly in full bloom—there must be 6 or 8 blossoms. Well, spring must be just about on schedule, in spite of our record cold winter. I remember that three years ago, when I entered the hospital March 31, we had our first daffodils.

While Carson had plans to buy the house on Williamsburg Drive, several factors beyond her control made her unable to do so. Instead, she moved to Berwick Road in Quaint Acres, Silver Spring, the first and only house she would own here, and one that she could even play a role in designing from the ground up. The perfect house, she wrote to her beloved friend Dorothy Freeman, would have a big picture window and ample opportunities for light to shine in. She situated the house on its corner lot just so, facing the full acre of property and the woods extending past it, leading to another section of the Northwest Branch.

Her local environs directly influenced some of her writing as well. From explorations of her garden at night to reflective prose-poems written in local parks like Sligo Creek, her ability to marvel at the life around her was evidenced in her most regular haunts.

The local community, like her natural surroundings, played a significant role in Carson’s life and work as a writer. While she maintained strong connections with friends from her work at USFWS, her most active social network was the local Audubon Society. It is unclear the date that Carson first became a member, but as far back as 1942 she is listed as a member (with her address “9409 Flower Ave, Silver Spring”) and that same year the Society’s Library Committee includes her *Under the Sea-Wind* among its notice of “Recently Published Bird Books.” Carson was a board member of the Society for the majority of the period 1947-1958, though work trips, family responsibilities, summer retreats to Maine, and illness often kept her from consistent board meeting participation. Early on, she headed the Radio Committee and later served as a contributing editor to *The Wood Thrush* and *Atlantic Naturalist* publications.

During many periods of her life in Maryland, Society bird walks along the canal and field trips to the Eastern Shore, lectures, and the sometimes contentious board meetings were Carson’s primary activity outside of her working and caregiving life. Of course, while recreational in spirit, the strong friendships made through the AS and the subject matter involved—birds, habitats, nature education, pesticides, and more—strongly influenced her work as a writer.

Through her work at USFWS, Rachel Carson had been aware of the wildlife threats from DDT since 1945; the articles that she helped to edit and publish in *The Wood Thrush* and *Atlantic Naturalist* provided a steady drumbeat of facts and concern about a wide range of harmful synthetic chemical pesticides.

Shortly after Carson settled into her new home built on Berwick Road, she was struck by an unwavering sense of responsibility to inform the public about the increasingly undeniable harms of indiscriminate spraying of synthetic chemical pesticides, including DDT. “Knowing what I do, there would be no future peace for me if I kept silent,” Carson confided in a letter in mid-1958. Marshaling countless contacts, institutional connections, and her own keen research skills and literary prowess, she spent the next four years writing *Silent Spring*, a manuscript published first in *The New Yorker* and then in book form in the summer and fall of 1962, respectively. The book presented a case for the more selective, sparing, and intelligent use of pesticides and a plea for society, government, and industry to consider vast consequences of powerful modern technology on an inherently interconnected living world. Already a best-selling and trusted author, Carson had no trouble bringing attention to *Silent Spring*, including from the White House. After President John F. Kennedy’s Science Advisory Committee validated the general claims made by Carson’s work, the nationwide airing of a favorable “CBS Reports” investigation and interview, and strong congressional testimonies by Carson, the groundwork was laid for further study and future regulatory action of the most potent pesticides, despite a steady barrage of pushback by industry and sometimes government interests. Rachel Carson passed away before many of the related environmental reforms were made, dying from complications from breast cancer at home in Silver Spring at age fifty-six, only eighteen months after *Silent Spring* was published.⁶⁹

A (Mostly) Unpublished Peek into Rachel Carson’s World⁷⁰

In a rare in-depth interview, one week before *Silent Spring* was released in book form, Rachel Carson’s life and work in Silver Spring were captured as fully intertwined with the natural world surrounding her suburban home, the place where she had written *Silent Spring*. Over the course of two days—September 20 and 21, 1962—*LIFE* magazine’s Jane Howard and photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt interviewed and photographed Carson in her native habitat.

The very private Carson had been going to great lengths to ensure her public image would not distract from nor prove detrimental to her work or to the reception of her message. She would rather not have the focus of attention on herself, but in the instances when that was not feasible, she strove to represent herself as composed, clear-eyed, and unbiased by anything other than the facts. Rachel Carson was so conscious of public perception that she “wouldn’t pick up a caterpillar crossing the road for fear she’d be thought a peace nut.”⁷¹

But soon after, Howard wrote in her reporter’s notebook, Carson decided to pick up the caterpillar, “lifting it gently, and set it down out of traffic’s way.” Howard, on assignment to write a “Close-Up” article for *LIFE*, thought so much of the momentary interaction that she led with it in her submitted draft to her editor, beginning her high-profile piece on one of the nation’s most popular and esteemed nonfiction writers:

On a sunny afternoon in Silver Spring, Maryland, a caterpillar with fur the colors of Halloween inched its gradual way across a thoroughfare.

Howard’s draft continued, noting the caterpillar’s safe passage thanks to Carson and the request that the caterpillar ordeal not be photographed. “If you show me helping an insect you’ll be giving ammunition to all the people who think of me as ‘that woman,’” Carson said. “It’s getting these days so that ‘nature lover’ is an epithet, associated in many people’s minds with being a communist.”⁷²

In her Silver Spring garden and likely back inside the house, where Eisenstaedt took a series of photos on the family room floor with her cat, Carson went on to share with Howard in seemingly endless detail the problems and potential solutions concerning the “pesticide problem.” For Carson, the blind acceptance and near fixation on using synthetic chemicals was putting at risk the “delicate balance of nature” while not even solving a pest problem. Sharing the latest

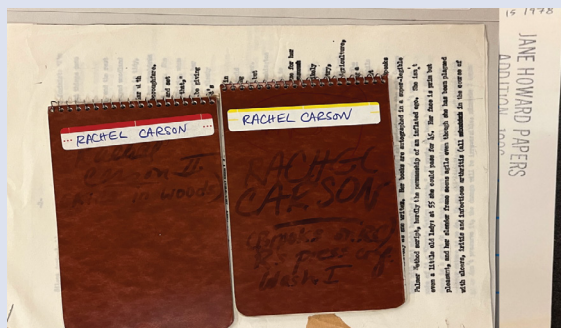
news of pesticide poisoning victims, Carson covered many of the same topics that were argued and substantiated in *Silent Spring* but went much farther in her recommendations for the American people. Howard, fitting as many specifics as she could in each small page of notepaper, listed numbered steps that “communities” and “households” must take to lessen the impact of popular and indiscriminate pesticide use.

- Recommendation 4a for communities: *Ask why spray—what are the facts—is it true that there’s an abundance of insects posing such health hazard as to justify drastic measures? [So many people spray because it’s the thing to do].*
- Tip 8 for households: *... A person who’s really sensitive to chlorinated hydrocarbons must watch this. Undue amount of fuss about mothproofing—it doesn’t mean you’re a bad housekeeper if your things aren’t mothproofed. If you put the sealed bag in the freezer for 24 hours—this will kill the moth larvae.*

It had become increasingly characteristic of Carson, when giving speeches or testimony, to launch into a lengthy list of examples of pesticide misuse, wildlife deaths, and human illnesses, a catalogue of the harms and destruction of which the public had been unaware. This interview, from her home in the Quaint Acres community in Silver Spring, proved distinct as it was unavoidably personal and domestic. “A sense of personal responsibility is what we desperately need.” Walking around the wooded yard, she pointed out “I don’t spray at all—and look how extremely healthy this shrub looks.” Carson talked about mosquitos and that one can “eliminate the breeding places... the little ponds of stagnant water” rather than spray. She mentioned to Howard that from her home library, which neighbors reported as being impressive and extensive, her family had been hearing the song of a whippoorwill.

The group journeyed from her house to the nearby woods and stream. Near the banks of the Northwest Branch, Carson shared with Howard that a “wonderful big Barred Owl with a deep voice” was living there. “A favorite spot of mine,” as Carson called their destination, was the Northwest Branch location where she often liked to bring “binoculars or lunch.”

Multiple children from the neighborhood, playing near Carson’s “favorite spot” and accompanied by their dogs, found themselves featured in the published photographs from that day. Howard named six children, who lived on Apple Grove Road and Michale Court, streets that ran perpendicular and parallel to Carson’s Berwick Road. “Donna Parsell, David E., Bruce Parsell, Keith Parsell, Robbie Urich, Robt J,” noted Howard in her notebook, including brief descriptions of several of the children’s attire.



Items from the Jane Howard Collection, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.



Rachel Carson and Jane Howard. Howard notes that Carson is “dressed in green and brown as nature.” Evident on Carson’s skirt and stockings is beggar’s lice, to which Howard refers in her notebook. (Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Time/LIFE*, 1962)

Once the two women made it down to the large metamorphic rocks lining the creek, Eisenstaedt took multiple photos of Carson reading from Gavin Maxwell’s *Ring of Bright Water*, a book that told of Scottish wild otters. Earlier in one notebook, Howard had written a note to Eisenstaedt castigating him for not taking a photo of her with her interviewee. In this setting, the famed photographer captured the desired photo, with Howard carefully balancing herself over two segments of the boulder on which Carson sat.

In these photos, and the ones taken of Rachel Carson trekking back up the steep valley slopes, one can see what Jane Howard

had observed in her notebook: Carson's skirt and stockings were now covered with beggar's lice (likely *Hackelia virginiana*) from their walk in the woods.

Eisenstaedt provided readers a peek into Carson's life in Maryland. The study desk topped with papers, books, and Moppet the cat. The backyard woods along Northwest Branch with neighborhood boys with their dogs and Chuck Taylors, to whom Carson can't help herself but offer up ideas for wonder-filled experiences: look up at the moon with ordinary binoculars to see migrating birds at night; watch frog eggs—a common sight in spring in the vernal pools near the Northwest Branch⁷³—underneath a microscope in the sunlight. A bird walk to nearby Glover Archbold Park (D.C.) with members of the Audubon Naturalist Society, including Shirley Briggs with her Roger Tory Peterson *Field Guide to the Birds* in hand.

Howard's notebooks and draft gives a clearer sense of Carson's personal life and natural surrounding than had been made public through previous interviews. They reveal the presence of Carson's ten-year-old grandnephew, who she had adopted as her son, Howard concluding, "No husband, but plenty of family." The slog to research and write *Silent Spring* and the ailments Carson told Howard she has faced while writing it: "ulcers, iritis, infectious arthritis." Carson's answer to Howard's question of a redo on life: "I'd want to be a writer all over again, and a naturalist too." And, quite prominently, in Jane Howard's submission, the wildlife around Carson's Quaint Acres, Silver Spring: notes about a bunny, birds ("cardinals, titmice") and their abundant feeding stations. Howard also discussed with Carson the writer's next project:

⋮ When all the furor from *Silent Spring* dies down I'm going to return to a project that I had in mind before it
 ⋮ started. That is a book on exploring nature with your children, expanded from an article I once did called Teach
 ⋮ Your Child to Wonder. I don't like the title except the part about wondering.

She noted that Carson told her the reason she wrote *Silent Spring* is because she was concerned that future generations would not have the opportunity to *know nature*. Howard's draft showed that sentiment vividly, beginning and ending with Carson's love for her natural world.

While billed as a "Close-Up," the editors of *LIFE* seemed ultimately more interested in what Rachel Carson represented—the author of the controversial *Silent Spring*—than a true and up-close view of the person that Howard and Eisenstaedt had witnessed and captured elegantly in their respective notes and photography. In its entirety, the published article missed much of what Howard deemed important, much of her submitted draft. However, this review of Howard's notes and draft gives us a unique opportunity to peek into a few days during a very consequential time in Carson's life that unfortunately remained mostly unpublished.



Rachel Carson and children along the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, Silver Spring. (Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Time/LIFE*, 1962)



Rachel Carson and cat Moppet, Silver Spring. (Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Time/LIFE*, 1962)

Conclusion

Mid-century conservation efforts—from the effort to preserve the beloved C&O Canal Towpath to the wonder and wisdom of Rachel Carson’s articles and books written in Silver Spring and the final Chevy Chase homecoming of an Audubon Society that tirelessly fostered it all—was a deeply intentional, principled, and holistic movement. Throughout this time local conservation concerns increased with post-war initiatives that prioritized massive highway building programs and a faith in synthetic chemicals like DDT. While success varied in their efforts to slow or stop environmental destruction, local conservation leaders at the time did much to shape a philosophy that prioritized a vital and lifelong connection with and appreciation for the living world, leading from curiosity to understanding to awe and stewardship.

As the 1960s progressed, a fully fledged environmental movement took shape. Though Rachel Carson died in 1964, *Silent Spring* would continue to send shockwaves through society and government, sparking the development and passage of some of the most fundamental environmental laws in the United States (e.g. the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act) and the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The movement became centered on securing major policy changes that would work to curb pollution, increase energy efficiency, and slow climate change, for the benefit of the natural world and public health. While Montgomery County figures like Shirley Briggs and Roger Tory Peterson (who had by then moved to Connecticut) advocated on behalf of strong regulations, they remained committed to the fundamental principles of “Highroad” conservationism envisioned by the local Audubon Society. As the movement grew far beyond the county and region, new generations of Americans would reconnect with nature and rise to defend and expand on the policies and progress of mid-century advocates.



Hikers on the C&O Canal towpath. c. 1970 (*Montgomery History*)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Henson is the founder and executive director of Springsong Museum, a nonprofit organization devoted to the creation of a museum that connects community and nature through the wonder and wisdom of Rachel Carson, to be housed in a previously vacant historic industrial building in Silver Spring. Before starting Springsong in 2021, she most recently worked at Nature Forward’s Woodend Sanctuary helping to run the nature bookshop and consulted on deforestation-related projects for the nonprofit Ceres. Previously she spent nearly nine years at Calvert Investments, leading environmental screening and engagement. A Maryland Master Naturalist, she serves on the board of Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, the watershed organization stewarding a major tributary of the Anacostia River, and enjoys guest lecturing on U.S. Conservation History for the Natural History Field Studies program and serving as a Maryland History Day judge. Rebecca has a BA in History from Vanderbilt University and an MA in Politics, Policy, and Society, focused on comparative environmental policy, from the University of Bath (UK). For her work on Rachel Carson, she was awarded a 2026-2027 Beinecke Research Fellowship at Yale University.

Endnotes

- 1 Letter from Dorothy Freeman to Paul Brooks, June 21, 1971. Paul Brooks Collection at the Walden Woods Project.
- 2 Pennyfield Lockhouse as well as the nearby Plummer's Island (Montgomery County) were discussed as a location for the Society's "field headquarters." Among board members in attendance: Barnes, Briggs, Carson, Halle, and Peterson. Minutes of the Board of Directors, Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, June 8, 1948.
- 3 Letters to the Briggs Household, Iowa, August 11; September 9. Shirley Briggs Collection, Iowa Women's Archive, University of Iowa.
- 4 Shirley Briggs, "Books: Spring in Washington," *Atlantic Naturalist*, 1957.
- 5 This effort was a component of the National Audubon Society and USFWS nationwide breeding-bird study.
- 6 Irston Barnes, "Bald Eagle survey" announcement and request for public's help in completing it. Long-standing surveys by ANS and Florida AS showing clear decline in the eagle population, January 7, 1961; "Census Finds Bald Eagle Vanishing From Capital, Pesticides Blamed" citing studies by Audubon Naturalist Society, [The Washington Post](#), 1960.
- 7 Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, January 25, 1945, and January 6, 1948.
- 8 Conservation Ethics, taught by Shirley Briggs, was among the longest running classes offered by the Certificate program.
- 9 Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, February 7, 1950, Smithsonian Archives. This board meeting was also attended by Briggs and Peterson, as was the January 3, 1950, meeting.
- 10 At the December 7, 1949, board meeting, attended by Briggs, Carson, and Peterson, the board votes to approve a committee to rename the Wood Thrush, but no committee members are appointed at this meeting.
- 11 "The Concept of an Audubon Society," *Atlantic Naturalist* 17(1): 6-10, 1962. "A more broadly integrated common purpose, as well as greater integrity of purpose, has been a constantly pursued goal during my years with the Society." The goal of a common, principled purpose, Barnes wrote in 1962, was "deliberately formulated" by Barnes and a cadre of members, including Roger Tory Peterson, on a long drive after a field excursion to the Eastern Shore in the mid-1940s. "With the purpose of enriching the members' spontaneous emotional interest in birds, we sought to provide an intellectual understanding of the biology and psychology birds, of the principles of ecology, and the ethics of conservation. This was the primary reason for launching our magazine and starting our seminars."
- 12 "Abiding Audubon Principles," *Atlantic Naturalist* 12(5): 223, 260-261.
- 13 "The Audubon Highroad," *Atlantic Naturalist* 15(4): 231-271, 1960.
- 14 While it cannot be sufficiently addressed in this paper, Rachel Carson's next project was to be a sizable chapter book that explored this very concept in detail. In her 1956 article, "Help your child to wonder," she stated that nurturing a child's wonder from a young age would lead to countless benefits for the individual, his community, and the natural world.
- 15 Joe Holley, "Obituaries: William Warner; Wrote Classic on Chesapeake," *The Washington Post*, April 29, 2008.
- 16 Diaries and letters of Shirley Briggs, Shirley Briggs Collection, Iowa Women's Archive, University of Iowa.
- 17 RTP to SB, August 9, 1961.

- 18 Joseph Hickey, *Letter to American Motors Conservation Awards Committee, October 25, 1963.*
- 19 Diaries and letters of Shirley Briggs, Shirley Briggs Collection, Iowa Women's Archive, University of Iowa.
- 20 Countless corrections to countless letters, very particular about events that took place but also what Carson wouldn't have said, grammar she wouldn't have used, etc., fiction or hypotheticals not spared.
- 21 Rachel Carson Collection, USFWS, Shepherdstown, WV.
- 22 Shirley Briggs, "Our Dwindling Future," pulpit meditation at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, April 21, 1996.
- 23 Briggs moved to Sycamore Acres in Derwood, Montgomery County, where she died at age eighty-six in 2004.
- 24 Kat Long, "A Supreme Court justice hiked 185 miles to save Washington's C&O Canal from becoming a highway," *The Washington Post*, October 16, 2021.
- 25 Editorial Board, "Potomac Parkway," *The Washington Post*, January 3, 1954.
- 26 Earlier opposition from within the Maryland state government and advocates for fishing and hunting access was made prior to Barnes's piece, but these were not widely disseminated through the press or in an overtly public manner.
- 27 Irston Barnes, "Birding Along Canal Brings Rich Rewards," *The Washington Post*, April 13 and 27, 1952
- 28 Irston Barnes, "Audubon Society Holds May Day Count," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1952.
- 29 Irston Barnes, "Birds Seek Habitats to Fit Specific Needs," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 1952.
- 30 Letter from Irston Barnes to American Motors Conservation Awards Committee, 1963, Smithsonian Archives.
- 31 Barnes also describes AS's work on preserving the canal as beginning "long before the famous Justice Douglas—Washington Post hike from Cumberland to Washington."
- 32 Barry MacKintosh, "C&O Canal: The Making of a Park," National Park Service, 1991, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/449270>.
- 33 "Washington: City in the Woods," Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, 1953.
- 34 Warren F. Gardner, "Newsman Traces 'Big Walk' Along C&O Canal," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 26, 1954.
- 35 William O. Douglas, "Potomac Sanctuary," *The Washington Post*, January 19, 1954.
- 36 The walk through the portion of the Canal in Montgomery County was memorable for many reasons, including the "dog that errantly joined near Hagerstown [that] was joined by two dogs in the Whites Ferry area. They all disappeared at Seneca."
- 37 "Canal Hike," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1954.
- 38 Irston Barnes, "A Towpath Hike Along the Potomac," *The Washington Post*, April 11, 1954.
- 39 The author is conducting additional research of the letters between Douglas and Barnes between 1953-1954. The only letters reviewed for this paper were those held by the Smithsonian Archives in the Audubon Naturalist Society Collection.
- 40 "Natural Value Clear All Along Canal Area," Irston Barnes, *The Washington Post*, April 11, 1954.
- 41 Revised *The Wood Thrush*, c. 1946.

- 42 Rachel L. Carson, "Books: Roger Tory Peterson, *Birds Over America*," *The Wood Thrush*, 1948.
- 43 Radio Script of Shirley Briggs and the Audubon Society, 1953.
- 44 The dinner was moved up ahead of schedule and took place in October 1944. "Annual Report of the Secretary" at the Annual Meeting of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, January 25, 1945, Smithsonian Archives.
- 45 He provided the AS with his photography for use in its publications, including its Natural History Field School prospectives throughout the 1950s. Also, Briggs reported at the December 11, 1950, board meeting that Peterson had given "permission to duplicate the slides made from the [60] plates in Mr. Peterson's Guide and sell them for [the Society's] own profit."
- 46 Peterson was nominated by Mr. Fast and elected unanimously, Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, March 4, 1947, Smithsonian Archives.
- 47 List of several members of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, with addresses and phone numbers, undated, Smithsonian Archives.
- 48 *The Echo*, August 1983.
- 49 Douglas Carlson, *Roger Tory Peterson: A Biography* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007).
- 50 The Medal's next recipient would be Rachel Carson for *The Sea Around Us*, which, in its first edition, shared a sense of optimism in nature's resiliency with regard to mankind's actions.
- 51 Carlson claimed that the Petersons wished to settle in a home that would be far from an atomic bomb attack. This was disputed by former neighbors interviewed and writing in *The Echo*.
- 52 *The Echo*, August 1983, "Occasionally we all see rare birds in the area, but far less frequently. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Vassar Circle was the scene of a daily trek to the Canal and the Potomac for bird-watchers, many on foot, with their binoculars and cameras. Some parked their bicycles in our yard, and others parked their cars in front of our property, as there was an open path to the Canal down from the corner of Wellesley Circle and Cornell."
- 53 Interior Secretary McKay, who greeted the walkers as they concluded their towpath journey in March 1954, backed the highway proposal two months later, acknowledging his support for roadbuilding plans despite being "together in principle" with Douglas and conservationist allies.
- 54 Renamed the Clara Barton Parkway in 1989.
- 55 Irston Barnes, "Highway Plan Plainly Imperils Park Values," *The Washington Post*, March 13, 1955.
- 56 *The Echo*, August 1983.
- 57 Other threats by infrastructure projects to the serenity and habitat health of the canal area of Montgomery County were raised by local Auduboners throughout this time. In 1967 Barnes and Briggs voiced opposition to damming and the "over" construction of bridges, overlooks, and platforms on the Maryland side of Great Falls that would threaten the natural attributes of land and water, with Briggs even devising and proposing more conscientious alternatives.
- 58 Irston Barnes, "Rock Creek Park Seen as Temple," *The Washington Post*, July 12, 1953.
- 59 Irston Barnes, "Road Planners Miss Natural Park Value," *The Washington Post*, November 22, 1953.
- 60 Rachel Carson, Speech to Theta Sigma Phi, 1954, notecards accessed at Rachel Carson Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.
- 61 "McKeldin Bars Any Plans to Construct Route 240 Through Rock Creek Park," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1954.

- 62 "Throngs Enjoy Outdoors on Rock Creek Park Day," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1955.
- 63 "Conservationists Plan Park Hike," *The Washington Post*, January 3, 1968.
- 64 A portion of Rachel Carson's ashes were interred next to her mother's at Parklawn Memorial Gardens in Rockville, Maryland, in a cemetery plot only a few hundred feet from the Rock Creek.
- 65 Laura Mol, a cofounder of the Friends of Sligo Creek watershed stewardship organization, researched and compiled this list through a review of archival materials, including those at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV.
- 66 This was her first publication in a national magazine as an adult; as a child and teenager, she had several pieces published in *St. Nicholas Magazine*.
- 67 Rachel Carson to Dorothy Freeman, May 14, 1955, "Roger went along to listen for veeries—his first bird walk, I guess, and I'd like to have had a movie. He was told we'd have to be quiet, so he tiptoed along the path with elaborate caution, talking in a loud whisper. He seemed to find the whole experience very exciting," May 28, 1955; on Carson's birthday she reports that they "had a picnic supper in the park in veery territory and heard much calling but no song." Most likely Woodmoor neighborhood woods near Northwest Branch of Anacostia River. The Capital Beltway was not yet constructed; it would soon span the prominent gorge near this part of Woodmoor/Indian Spring.
- 68 "Pinecrest Recreation Center," Maryland Historical Trust Inventory, Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, Pinecrest, August 15, 2013.
- 69 *Silent Spring* was written by Rachel Carson, but close friends and colleagues supported her work, especially as cancer and other illnesses made reading, typing, and even local travel difficult. Among those who played a vital supporting role was Chevy Chase-based researcher and assistant Jeanne Davis (1915-2004), who worked with Carson for five years. As historian Linda Lear wrote, "It is not too much to claim that without Davis, Carson could never have finished her book, nor would it have had the sound scientific underpinnings that allowed it to stand up to withering attack on publication," "Jeanne Davis Dies; Assisted Ecologist Rachel Carson," *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2005.
- 70 A significant body of research and analysis of Rachel Carson's life and work has been made to date, most prominently and in greatest detail by Montgomery County-based historian and biographer Linda Lear. New investigations into Carson's life continue, including what follows below, made possible through primary research related to Howard's reporter notebooks and article draft archived at Columbia University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library in New York. Previous writing about this interview does not appear to reflect these primary sources and does not indicate that, while a portion of it occurred in Glover Archbold Park in Washington, D.C., the majority of the Howard interview and corresponding Eisenstaedt photograph took place in Silver Spring.
- 71 Jane Howard, Reporter's Notebook, September 21, 1962, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
- 72 When Howard's piece was published on October 12, 1962 there was no mention of the caterpillar, nor the coherent observations that Howard, accompanied by photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt, made during their time briefly imbedded in Carson's modest suburban Montgomery County life.
- 73 Carson writes about hearing the Spring peepers and Wood frogs in early springtime in Silver Spring. In a later interview, Carson's son Roger states that she even made recordings of the frog sounds to play in the house at other times of the year, Letters, Bates College; interview by Mark Madison/USFWS.

